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ABSTRACT

The basic assumption underlying this study is that teacher involvement in professional growth activities would lead to improvement in knowledge and result in a change in practices. The objectives comprising the major focus of the inquiry were to measure and analyze professional involvement; to assess the degree of professional commitment of the respondents; to determine if a relationship exists between professional involvement and professional commitment, and to determine the relationship of teaching experience to professional involvement and professional commitment. A questionnaire was mailed to a random sample of 200 teachers. Five professional involvement variables were ranged in order of complexity. The lowest level was membership in a professional organization, and in ascending scale: participation in professional activities, informal activities, and knowledge implementation of exemplary curriculum practices. The highest rank was given to implementation of new curriculum practices. Results indicate that participation in professional growth activities results in greater commitment and changes in practice on the part of teachers. (JD)

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Variables Related to the Professional Growth of Teachers

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Variables Related To The Professional Growth of Teachers

ABSTRACT

What are the factors that motivate teachers to improve their professional competencies? This study focuses on the indicators of (1) professional commitment (2) involvement in professional growth activities (3) improvement through self-directed activities and the resulting change in knowledge and implementation of currently accepted curriculum practices. A positive relationship was ascertained between level of professional commitment and the other variables.

Preference for the familiar rather than venturing into the unknown, is a know inhibitor of change. Patterns become established that are difficult to break. This phenomenon is evident in the teaching profession and continues to be a hinderance to educational change.

Indications point to a more stabelized teacher population with fewer new entries into teaching each year. If the profession cannot count on the influx of new, energetic, young professionals, to act as catalysts for change, are there existing indicators that may assist in this process?

A number of educators stress the importance of in-service participation in improving educational programs and facilitating change in curriculum practices. Evans (1971) advocates a strong in-service emphasis for continuous professional growth of teachers, with the primary responsibility

falling upon the local education agency.

Thompson (1967) found that teachers of all levels were unfamiliar with current curricular concepts, thus indicating a need for professional improvement for all teachers. There is also little uniformity among school districts in their policies for developing and maintaining competence of the professional staff (Emanuel, 1971).

Bishop (1967) sees a need for increased commitment at the local level for professional growth activities if innovative ideas are to become fruitful. Virtually every new curricular modification requires new teaching and learning strategies. Just as evaluation is used for feedback and guidance, so in-service education can be used for adaption and innovation.

Recommendations from a study by Crabtree and Hughes (1969) suggest an increased responsibility by professional organizations for the in-service education of their members. Professional organizations have always had a basic goal of improving the knowledge and competencies of their members. Perhaps this goal could be re-emphasized to meet current needs.

The role of commitment as a motivator for improvement and change was expressed by John Gardner in Self Renewal

> "Renewal depends in some measure on motivation, commitment, conviction, the values men live by, the things that give meaning to their lives" (1963, p. 119).

Hershenson (1968) identifies commitment as the final stage of vocational development. It involves both one's personal satisfaction and fulfillment with a job and one's functioning as an individual in the world.

An instrument was developed by Loftis (1962) to measure professional commitment. It was discovered that no differences existed in levels of professional commitment between men and women. Professional commitment was also independent of other factors such as age, marital status, educational level and teaching experience.

No previous research has attempted to link professional commitment to a willingness to change teaching practices. There is also no evidence that commitment may be a factor in motivating teachers to participate in professional growth activities, or that this participation may result in increased commitment.

The basic assumption underlining the study was that involvement in professional growth activities would lead to improvement in knowledge and result in a change in practices. This professional involvement would also be positively related to professional commitment. An additional concern was the relationship of teaching experience to both professional involvement and commitment to teaching.

Professional involvement of teachers was indicated in this study by membership in professional organizations, participation in formal and informal meetings, workshops

and other activities, knowledge of exemplary curriculum practices and implementation of these practices. The purpose of the study was to determine if a positive association exists between the involvement variables and the professional commitment level of the teachers.

The following objectives comprise the major focus of the study:

1. To measure and analyze professional involvement;
2. To assess the degree of professional commitment of the respondents;
3. To determine if a relationship exists between professional involvement and professional commitment.
4. To determine the relationship of teaching experience to professional involvement and professional commitment.

METHOD

A questionnaire was developed, tested with a small number of teachers, revised, and mailed to a random sample of 200 home economics teachers in Massachusetts. Teachers in a specialized area were used in the study to simplify the identification of professional activities and curriculum practices. It was assumed that findings from the teachers in one discipline would be applicable to teachers in other subject areas.

Five areas were included in the questionnaire to indicate the degree of professional involvement.

·Membership in professional organizations. Current

membership in one or more professional organizations was indicated by each respondent. The organizations selected were National Education Association (NEA) and its state and local affiliates, and professional organizations associated with the teachers' subject matter specialty.

- Participation in formal professional growth activities. These were limited to those in which participation had taken place within the previous five years. Activities included graduate-level courses, professional meetings, workshops, and local in-service activities.
- Participation in informal professional growth activities. These were of a self-initiated or more informal nature than the activities in group two. Included were teacher use of professional resources, involvement in school and department activities, visits to other schools and cooperation with teacher educators.
- Knowledge of exemplary curriculum practices. Fourteen exemplary curriculum practices were identified through a survey of current literature and by considering the emphases of professional meetings and workshops within the past five years. Respondents indicated their familiarity with each practice according to the following scale - very familiar, moderately familiar, slightly familiar and unfamiliar.
- Implementation of exemplary curriculum practices.

Teachers were asked to indicate which, if any, of the 14 previously identified curriculum practices they were currently using or had previously used in their classrooms.

Professional commitment for each respondent was determined through the use of the Loftis Measure of Professional Commitment (MOPC). This one hundred-item instrument was developed and validated by Loftis (1962), who concluded that the MOPC produced consistent results, discriminated among teachers with varying degrees of professional commitment, and was independent of personal factors.

Results and Discussion

Responses from 140 teachers supplied the data for the study for a response rate of 70%. Background information indicated that 75 percent of the sample taught in schools with 500 to 1,500 students, 50 percent had been teaching less than five years and 20 percent held a Master's degree. Fifty-four percent taught at the senior high school level while the remainder taught in junior high school.

The five variables used to determine professional involvement were compared, and an association determined, by arranging them in order of complexity. Guttman (1954), suggests this approach as a basis for comparing different variables. The lowest level was determined as membership in a professional organization, since joining an organization requires only payment of dues. Second levels of involve-

ment were participation in professional growth activities, with self initiated informal activities being ranked higher than group activities. The benefits derived from participation in professional growth activities should increase knowledge, which was ranked fourth. Implementation of curriculum practices was considered the highest level, the rationale being that getting so caught up in ideas about one's profession that changed practices are instituted, denotes the highest level of professional involvement.

Correlation coefficients of the involvement variables are indicated in Table 1.

TABLE 1 COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN THE FIVE INDICATORS OF PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT.

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Membership in Professional Organizations	---					
(2) Formal Professional Growth Activities	.44	---				
(3) Informal Professional Growth Activities	.25	.46	---			
(4) Knowledge of Curriculum Practices	.16	.34	.48	---		
(5) Implemented Curriculum Practices	.19	.28	.46	.54	---	
(6) Professional Commitment	.26	.32	.35	.33	.23	---

When the five levels of professional involvement are arranged in order of lowest to highest, the variables form a pattern known as a simplex (highest correlations closest to the diagonal, with those in each row and column becoming smaller as they are positioned farther away from the diagonal). A set of variables whose correlations exhibit this pattern are measures of the same variable at different levels of complexity. This simplex would support the justification for this arrangement of the variables.

The Loftis MOPC instrument, used to determine the professional commitment scores, included seven areas as indicators of commitment: self-understanding, social relations, creativity, autonomy, rationality, ambition, and non-fanaticism. Each of the 100 items on the MOPC was rated with one of the three following responses: (0) Does not apply to this person (1) Sometimes true of this person (2) Usually true of this person. The value given each response was 0-2 as indicated above. The individual total scores ranged from 94 to 194, with a mean of 153.12 and a standard deviation of 18.7. The commitment levels of this sample are similar to the Allegheny County teachers tested by Loftis in developing the MOPC instrument.

Professional commitment scores correlated with each of the measures of involvement at about the same level, peaking slightly in the center (Table 1). All these correlations were significant at the one percent level. The involvement

variable with the highest correlation to professional commitment was participation in informal professional growth activities. These activities require initiative and self-motivation on the part of participants. According to the findings of the study, there is a highly significant association between participation in self-initiative activities and professional commitment.

Two other involvement variables having a highly significant correlation to the professional commitment were participation in formal professional growth activities, and knowledge of curriculum practices. These two involvement variables also correlated with each other at the same level as they related to professional commitment (Table 1). These results support the assumption that attendance at professional meetings, workshops and courses result in increased knowledge of curriculum practices.

The highest correlation of involvement variables, as indicated in Table 1, occurred between knowledge of curriculum practices and implementation of these practices. Teachers must obtain knowledge and be informed, if they are to change their practices. This information may be obtained from self-initiated activities such as reading professional periodicals, talking with other professionals or by attending professional meetings and participation in courses for college credit.

Patterns relating to years in teaching are illustrated in Table 2. The only significant correlation found to be associated with teaching experience was the participation level in formal professional growth activities. With experience comes the time and inclination to attend meetings and become involved professionally.

TABLE 2. CORRELATION OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE TO PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT VARIABLES AND PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT.

	Correlation Coefficients-Years in Teaching
Membership in Professional Organizations	.21*
Formal Professional Growth Activities	.43**
Informal Professional Growth Activities	.20*
Knowledge of Curriculum Practices	.00
Implemented Curriculum Practices	.02
Professional Commitment	.21*

** Significant at .001 level
* Significant at .01 level

The absence of any relationship between years of teaching and higher levels of professional involvement produced significant findings. The results confirm the assumption that once patterns are established they become difficult to change as illustrated by the lack of implementation of current curriculum practices.

Even though the older more experienced teachers participated in professional growth activities, there was little evidence that this involvement improved their know-

ledge of curriculum practices. These findings have implications relating to the quality of these activities.

CONCLUSIONS

Variables used to determine professional involvement were validated as measures of the same variable at different levels of complexity by the Guttman Simplex. The five variables in order of complexity are membership in professional organizations, participation in formal and informal professional growth activities, knowledge and implementation of current curriculum practices.

All of the professional involvement variables related significantly at the .01 level to the professional commitment scores, producing a cause and effect relationship. Participation in professional growth activities does result in greater commitment. This should be a stimulus for increased emphasis and opportunity for teacher participation in these activities.

Changes in practices were also the results of professional involvement. This was most evident among the younger, less-experienced teachers. Participation of the more experienced teachers did not always result in improved teaching practices. These results indicate the need for research to identify the influence producing changes in practices among the more experienced teachers.

If teacher involvement in professional growth activities, has a significant effect on level of commitment

and improvement in teaching as indicated by the results of the study, then more emphasis should be placed on these activities. School boards need to provide motivation and time for teachers to participate. Meaningful professional growth experiences need to be made available by the local education agencies, colleges and universities, state departments and education and professional organizations. As the need for pre-service education decreases, the emphasis and resources could shift to the professional improvement of teachers.

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